



NEWS

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The United States Department of the Interior and the Government of Guatemala Sign Memorandum of Understanding to Protect Major Maya Archaeological Sites at El Mirador

(WASHINGTON)—Secretary of the Interior Dirk Kempthorne, Chief of Staff to the President of Guatemala, Carlos Fión, and Director of Culture for the Ministry of Culture and Sports, Salvador Lopez, signed a Memorandum of Understanding today that launches a ten-year partnership for the conservation of significant natural and cultural resources in Guatemala.

The Department of the Interior's International Technical Assistance Program (DOI-ITAP) will provide independent technical expertise to the Guatemalan Government and its partners on numerous aspects of natural and cultural management. The initial focus of the partnership will be to promote sustainable development at the El Mirador National Park, an important tourist destination in Guatemala, while protecting its resources.

Funding for DOI activities at El Mirador will come from the Global Heritage Fund, a U.S. non-governmental organization that has also contributed its expertise to investigations and conservation programs in this region.

Strong public-private partnerships are also forming to support the efforts at El Mirador. The Guatemalan business community will heavily fund much of the investigation, conservation and protection measures to be conducted on the site.



Carlos Fión, Chief of Staff to the President of Guatemala, Dirk Kempthorne, Secretary of the U.S. Department of the Interior, and Salvador Lopez, Director of Culture for the Guatemala Ministry of Culture and Sports, sign Understanding for a partnership that will help promote sustainable development in Guatemala.

"The United States and Guatemala have a strong relationship," Kempthorne said to members of the Guatemala delegation at a signing ceremony held in his office. "Both nations balance encouraging tourism with protecting natural resources. Both nations encourage public-private partnerships in conservation. I am pleased to be signing this Memorandum of Understanding."

El Mirador National Park, considered by archaeologists as the "Cradle of Maya Civilization," is located within the largest tract of virgin tropical forest remaining in Central America and is home to the largest and earliest cities of the Maya world. La Danta, the largest temple at El Mirador, is the largest known pyramid in the Western Hemisphere. Important archaeological findings in this region, led by Idaho State University archaeologist Dr. Richard Hansen, have re-written the history of Maya civilization, pushing their history back by 1,000 years. Recent national publicity including the National Geographic documentary "Dawn of the Maya" has prompted a rapid increase in tourism in the area. As the park currently offers little to no visitor infrastructure or education, the DOI-ITAP partnership with Guatemala will help ready the park for the expected continued increase in tourism to this area.

Fión told Secretary Kempthorne, "it is an honor for the Government of Guatemala to share a table with you. We recognize and thank you for the interest and support of the United States. The commitment of Guatemala in the area of conservation and protection of the environment, and natural and archaeological resources is total, including many parts of the Guatemalan government, the private sector, and individuals."

DOI-ITAP will also assist the Guatemalan government with the development of park management plans, the strengthening of park law enforcement for the protection of its resources and visitors, and the design and posting of educational and interpretive information at the sites to enhance the visitor experience.

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